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15TH MAY 2019

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TRAVEL NEWS

LATEST TRAVEL ADVICE OFFERS AND NEWS

LINDSAY SUTTON reports on a time-honoured role dating back to the days of Henry VIII

The phrase 'legend in his or her lifetime' is often an over-used exaggeration. In the case of Cedric Robinson – the longest-serving Queen's Guide to the Sands of Morecambe Bay – it is absolutely spot on.

Over his 55-year tenure, Cedric has changed what had become an archaic post into a relevant and dynamic role that raises thousands of pounds for charities.

Each year more than 10,000 fund-raising walkers are guided across the eight miles of often treacherous and shifting sands of Morecambe Bay, a tidal 'wet Sahara' that stretches for 220 acres between the Lancashire and Cumbria coasts of North West England.

Now, 86-year-old Cedric, a fisherman on foot in the bay since he was 14 years old, is handing on the Queen's Guide baton to a new holder of the post.

But Cedric will still be around as Ambassador of the Sands, advising his chosen successor, Michael Wilson, as he beds into the highly responsible task in hand. And no-one can take away his record. He is the longest-serving guide since Henry VIII first bestowed the honour in 1534.

Like Cedric, Michael is a third-generation fisherman, cockler and mussels from Hookburgh, a fishing community on the coast, south of the Lake District.

Together, from May until late September, they will lead a new phalanx of walkers along the route they have marked out as safe during a pre-walk recon.

The responsibility is great, since each walk has up to 800 participants, all of whom have to be led safely across the shifting sands and channels.

The dangers of Morecambe Bay were made only too apparent by the tragedy of the Chinese cocklers on one fateful winter's night in February 2004. In all, 21 men and women were swept out to sea as they harnessed cockles against a rising tide.

"The waters can come in faster than a galloping horse," Cedric warns.

From this weekend onwards, the 'season' of cross-bay walks begins.

NEED TO KNOW

■ Walks start from Arnside, South Lakes, and finish at Kerth Bank Station, the eight-mile crossing taking between three and four hours. Trains back to Arnside take less than 10 minutes – see thetrainline.com for timetables and fares.

■ A range of B&Bs and hotels is available at Arnside and Grange-over-Sands. Or book a cottage for a longer stay with

A very British BAYWATCH



Dashing through the waves on a one-horse open carriage



Walkers wade knee-deep through the shallows

They are all carefully planned according to the time of the tide, the width and depth of the River Kent, which runs into the Bay, and the location of the ever-changing patches of quicksand.

Over the years, the walk has become a 'bucket list' target for thousands of people from all over the UK, if not the world – and Cedric is paid £15 a year, plus several hundred other people.

As Cedric says: "The scenery" changes a hundred times a day with the golden hues of sandbanks, the glowing olivaceous water, the big skies above and the distant shapes of the surrounding hills, mountains and fells of Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cumbria's Lake District.

Sounds range from the chatter of excited walkers to the haunting cry of the oyster catcher, the chattering of a flock of starlings or the plaintive sound of the curlew.

Walkers arrive by train, mainly from Carnforth on the major West Coast line, or by car, and change

ready for the trek. Most start in old trainers, although some go barefoot like Cedric, leaving the initial hard-packed sands.

A mile or so down a track takes you to the sands, and once addressed by Cedric, off you go, following his instructions. If he whistles, you stop and listen.

You feel connected with nature, even though you're with several hundred other people.

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The smells of the bay are there to savour, including the freshness of the sea-salted air.

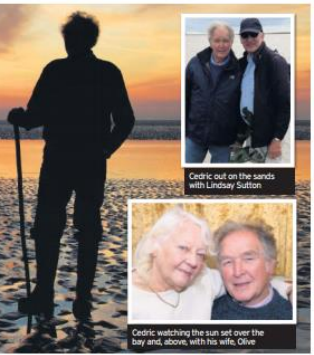
The taste of salt is there too, especially when you're next to an open stretch of water and the sense of touch can be heightened by feeling sand in your toes, bringing back memories of childhood or the pushing your legs against the running water in the channels.

It's all there, for all the five senses – and how.

As you walk across the carefully marked Kent channel, excitement mounts.

Moody, the water is up to your knees, or just above, but it's always an extraordinary experience. Then it's the home run across the sands, and then the salt marshes, which can be a slip-slide, muddy experience, depending on recent rainfall.

So what of the bigger picture, and the 'health' of the bay and its



Cedric out on the sands with Lindsay Sutton



Cedric watching the sun set over the bay and, above, with his wife, Olive

surrounding communities? It doesn't take scientific reports to convince Cedric of the effects of global warming.

"The evidence is there, right outside my front door," he says. "I rarely need to have to cancel a walk, but I had to postpone four weekends a couple of years ago. It was the worst season I've known for wind and rain together. I remember my old dad, who lived to 104, telling me: 'It never blows hard on a high tide, but it does now, lad.'"

Scientists at nearby Lancaster University verify Cedric's observations.

There has been a 30% seasonal increase in rainfall in the Morecambe Bay area over the past 50 years, causing dramatic flooding, particularly in the nearby Lake District and on the Lancashire coast.

A whole kilometre of salt marsh has been eroded from one side of the bay in just 35 years. Plastic pollution affects wildlife above and below the water – but if saloons are rarely seen nowadays, let alone preposers, there's good news on the bird front.

More than 250,000 birds master in the Bay area during migration seasons, including the 'booming bittern' and the avocet,

which has become the RSPB emblem. RSPB Lightfoot Moss Nature Reserve, on the Lancashire side, has worked hard to bring back both these birds, and to encourage them to breed.

Careful reed bed management has attracted starlings en masse: it is almost beyond belief that up to 200,000 of them can take part in dusk-time 'mummurations', when they wheel and turn, almost as one, a sight to behold.

Changes to Rospide communities have represented a challenge.

Morecambe has battled to find a future after the sun and sangria brigade left the creaking old resort for Spain in the 1970s. Problems remain but it has found a new purpose.

That has been boosted by the prospect of Sir Tim Smith bringing an Eden Project North to the Morecambe coastline if the 100million funding can be raised.

Grange-over-Sands has suffered from being a seaside. 'Trophy of the North' is becoming quite a vibrant community.

Little Arnside is adjusting to an increasing popularity, and, next door, Silverdale has become an arts community.

This is a British Baywatch with a difference.

LATE BREAKS

LAST-MINUTE DEALS ON HOLIDAYS

ENJOY A LUXURY BREAK IN CYPRUS

A SEVEN-night stay at Columbia Beach Resort, Cyprus, starts from £1043 per person.

This price is based on two adults and two children (aged 2-11 years) sharing an Executive Suite, Garden View, on a bed-and-breakfast basis, departing on May 27.

It includes direct, return flights from London Gatwick and private resort transfers. Regional departures are available.

To book, visit SovereignLuxuryHolidays.atsovereign.com or call 01293 839 151.

TRAVEL NEWS

LATEST TRAVEL ADVICE

OFFERS AND NEWS



Inside Bonham Hotel

BONHAM REVEALS ITS REVAMP EDINBURGH'S boutique Bonham Hotel has unveiled its multi-million-pound refurbishment.

All 49 rooms had a makeover last year and now the public areas of the West End hotel have been refreshed and a new restaurant, No. 35 at The Bonham, has opened.

Rates at the Georgian property start at £149 a night. Go to thebonham.com

Regional departures are available.

To book, visit SovereignLuxuryHolidays.atsovereign.com or call 01293 839 151.



Nobu's first hotel in Mexico

JOIN THE A LIST IN MEXICO NOBU has opened its first hotel in Mexico – a collaboration between stellar chef Nobu Matsuhisa and Hollywood legend Robert De Niro.

The 200-room beachfront property is in upscale celeb hotspot Los Cabos on the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula.

A-listers such as George Clooney, Cameron Diaz and Will Smith have been spotted at the destination and the new hotel blends contemporary Japanese minimalism with locally sourced natural materials.

Features include four pools, a spa and, of course, the world-renowned Nobu cuisine.

Rates start at £327 a night. Visit nobuhotelloscabos.com

NEW CHAPTER FOR LONDON HOTELS HONG Kong's Page Hotels is entering the London luxury market this autumn.

The 138-room Page8 in Charing Cross will have a large rooftop restaurant and al fresco bar with views of Trafalgar Square, a coffee house, and rooms with lots of natural light.

Rates will start at £280 a night. See pagehotels.com

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Sykes Holiday Cottages on 01244 746032 or via sykescottages.co.uk

■ For cross bay walks see quidoversands.co.uk or call 015395 58555.

■ Sands of Time by Lindsay Sutton is available in paperback from publisher Great Northern Books for £11.99. Visit gnbooks.co.uk

Walkers head out safely, under the watchful eye of their guide